

Streets + Byways

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## A Cow's Tale

By PRISCILLA HARRIS

When our neighbor, Raymond MacFarlane, stopped by on a recent Sunday morning and asked if we had noticed a hole in the road above the cow pass, I had to admit that we had almost run over it the day before. It seemed to have appeared practically overnight.

He and I walked down to investigate. It was an almost round hole seven to eight inches across, and it was right above the cow tunnel the state had built for my father exactly 70 years ago.

As we peered down into it we were amazed to discover that below the surface of the road there was nothing but space for four feet or more. What was holding up the road — the road being Rte. 53 — a very busy thoroughfare? We could see a retaining wall for the tunnel under the road, all exposed.

Raymond and I agreed that it would be just a matter of time before the hole got big enough for the front end of a car to go down into it, causing a series of accidents. We hurried back to my house and Raymond called the Duxbury Police, then rushed back to the road to flag them down, which turned out to be necessary as they zoomed by three minutes later.

They must have wondered what all the fuss was about when they saw the size of the hole; however, when they looked down into it, and saw nothing holding up the road they shared our alarm.

"What's this over here?" one of them asked. "That," I replied, "is a tunnel built by the state of Massachusetts for my father's cows 70 years ago where they built the road."

"No kidding!"

I went on: "They split my father's farm in half, and offered to pay him \$1400 for taking all that land. He was incensed, and went to the State House several times to argue his case, pointing out that it would be a hardship to have his cow barn on one side of the road and the pasture on the other." Several days went by,



State engineers will decide how to best repair the hole above the cow tunnel.

and when my father got back to the State House they were ready for him.

"Well!" one of them said, "we can't give you any more money for your land because then everyone on the route will ask for more, but what we will do is build you a tunnel under the road for your cows."

By now two more cruisers had arrived and I had a very interested audience. They had heard of the tunnel but didn't know where it was. Somebody said, "I heard there was a story about it in *Yankee* magazine."

"That's right," I quickly replied, "I wrote it."

"Did the cows go back and forth?"

"Actually, my father had only one cow at the time (that was something he didn't tell the state), and she would have nothing to do with it."

The police lost no time in surrounding the hole with several bright orange cones, and placing a high round object over it. Good!

Two mornings later I heard all kinds of interesting noises coming from Rte. 53. I hurried to the source, camera in hand, and was soon joined by Raymond.

A variety of bright yellow vehicles were parked along the road, and more were arriving. About a dozen sturdy-looking workmen carrying interesting-looking machinery and lights were striding about; some of them looking into the hole and others into the tunnel — all with questioning expressions.

The man who seemed to be in charge came over to me and

said, "Do you happen to know anything about this tunnel...., when it was built and for what reason?"

"Actually, I know quite a lot about it," I answered brightly, and proceeded to give him an abbreviated version of my *Yankee* story. A few of the other men moved into earshot.

"No kidding — the state actually built that for your father's one cow?"

"My father said nobody asked him how many cows he had."

"Things haven't changed much in 70 years; they still don't know what they're doing," the head man said.

"The town of Duxbury owns it now, I suppose, this is conservation land all around it," Raymond offered.

"Well, we won't do anything to the front of it." He invited me to follow him back to the hole, and pointed out the retaining wall of the tunnel which could be seen down in it. It had buckled and had a large hole at the bottom.

"That should be fixed; otherwise it would eventually collapse and fall into the tunnel, and that would never do, considering the rarity of cow tunnels in the state. About the empty space under the hole, that's another problem. You father sure opened a can of worms," he sighed.

As the *Yankee* story ends: "...if the state had paid my father anywhere near what he wanted for his land, they would have saved themselves a lot of money." Still holds!